

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

**PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

AND THE

**CHILD AND YOUTH SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR AND PENSIONS**

**MEETING JOINTLY
ON
ISSUES AFFECTING MILITARY FAMILIES**

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Good afternoon Chairman Chambliss, Chairman Alexander, and members of the Subcommittees. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss the child care and school transition challenges facing military parents. It is my privilege to represent the Child and Youth Programs of our Armed Services and to tell you about our initiatives that respond to the needs of our military parents.

As the Director of Army Child and Youth Services, I can report that never have the stresses of military parenting been greater than in this “post-9/11 world” – nor has the need been greater to assure our military parents that their children will be well cared for as they deal with the daily impact of the Global War on Terrorism. Throughout these significant challenges, our Military Child and Youth Programs are also accommodating the needs of our military communities and striving to meet the ever-increasing demand for unique child care options and school transition services not found in the private sector.

Introduction and Background

The requirement for Military Child Care and Youth Programs is – quite simply – to support force readiness by reducing the conflict between the parental responsibilities of military Service members and unit mission requirements. There is no doubt the conflict is there. The Army Sample Survey of Military Personnel Spring 2002 data shows 27 percent of enlisted soldier parents who use child care lost duty time in a three-month period due to the lack of child care. This reflects a rising trend, up from 20 percent in 1995 and 23 percent in 1999. Likewise, a Fall 2001 Survey showed 27 percent of enlisted soldier parents with children 13-18 years living with them lost duty time in a twelve-month period as a result of dealing with youth misconduct. Clearly these trends

demonstrate the fact that availability of child care and youth supervision options has an impact on military mission readiness.

There are many military-unique factors that make child care and youth supervision options a necessity to support our troops, e.g., military families are younger families with children away from their own extended families and neighborhoods; large numbers of infants and toddlers – the very age group that care is least available for off post; military duties requiring child care and youth supervision options 10-14 hours per day including early morning, evenings, and weekends as well as round-the-clock care – sometimes for an extended period of time; lack of care options at remote sites and overseas; and large numbers of parents whose spouses are deployed making them temporarily geographically single, as well as true single and dual military parents. Likewise, the mobile military lifestyle with its frequent relocations makes school transitions difficult - especially for teens. Quality Child and Youth Programs allow Service members to focus on their missions knowing that their children are thriving in our child care programs and their teens are adjusting well to new schools. Military Child Care and Youth Programs are an incalculable force multiplier.

With the advent of the Global War on Terrorism, military parents literally “go to war” each day they leave their homes. It may be they will be gone for a day and return home that night. It may be they will board a ship and be gone for six months. To a child or young person who sees the reality of this war on the evening news, the fact that his or her parent – or, in some cases, both parents – must leave every day to face this threat can be understandably frightening. Military Child Care and Youth Programs have responded, meeting as many needs as current resources allow...most recently during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Child Care and Youth Supervision Options to Support Military Parents

In a very real sense, Military Child Care Programs also “go to war” whenever our military forces are called upon to do so. Many installations and bases have Child Care

Mobilization and Contingency Plans that can be activated whenever there is an extraordinary contingency condition, be it a natural disaster or a war. When these child care plans are activated, here are some of the things that happen to benefit military parents, especially parents who may have been sharing child care arrangements and now will need additional support while one of the parents is deployed:

- Child care options provided are tailored to meet the current mission requirements, e.g., hours of operation may be adjusted to support an extended duty day, more hourly care is available to support unit briefings.
- Child and Youth staff identify locations for alternative child care sites to expand services.
- Staff recruitment and background check actions are expedited to replace those family member employees who return home during the sponsor's deployment and to accommodate increase in children served.
- Safety and security measures are augmented and may include the designation of staff as "mission essential personnel" in order to provide child care services for other mission essential personnel.
- Fees are often reduced and extended child care hours in support of the mission may be provided at little or no cost to Service members.

Today, thousands of Child and Youth employees and Military Home Care providers are supporting families of deployed troops, often beginning as early as 4:30 a.m. and going until late into the evening to support shift workers. Military Home Care providers frequently provide additional evening hours of care taking the children to ball practice, choir, helping with homework, and volunteering to coach youth sports teams whose coaches are deployed. Staff also often work at night and weekends to provide care during family readiness group meetings and special events held by the installation to support families of deployed Service members. In short, Child and Youth employees and Military Home Care providers are making every effort to provide a "normal" life to children who desperately need this support.

It may not sound extraordinary to us, but to the families that are supported, the efforts of these Child and Youth staff and Military Home Care providers make all the difference in their ability to cope with the stress of family separation. Telling, too, is the fact that many of them are also dealing with the deployment of their own spouses.

Here are some examples of initiatives implemented by the Services specifically to support the needs of parents during the current deployments:

- The Army offers extended hours care to Soldiers using Child Development Centers and Family Child Care Homes at 85 installations. Many of these locations are providing care for children of deployed Soldiers for up to 60 days in Family Child Care Homes. This allows these children to stay in a familiar setting as an alternative to foster care when grandparents or other family members are unable to care for them while their parent(s) is deployed. Providers caring for these children receive special training and oversight. An average of 38,000 hours of contingency related care is provided monthly in these child and youth programs. Twenty-one thousand of these care hours are in Family Child Care homes.
- The Navy is offering around-the-clock care in Pearl Harbor and Norfolk regions (where there are large fleet concentrations) to meet the extended hours need of shift workers and families of deployed sailors. The Navy is also creating a group home in each of these regions accommodating 12 – 18 children, with three shifts available.
- The Marine Corps is offering respite care, extended hours care, and child care during deployment briefings to support Marine Corps families. Deployment training materials for children were developed to assist Child and Youth staff and Home Care providers help children deal with the current deployment.
- The Air Force has expanded their Family Child Care Program at 70 Air Force Bases to help parents when they need care beyond their regular child care arrangements to include before, during, and after deployments. Child care services include extended duty care for parents who work extended hours or have a shift change or need temporary help. Sixteen hours of care are offered

for each child in families of active duty military, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve members returning from deployments of 30 days or more so they can spend time with spouses and catch up on family duties. An average of 11,000 hours of care is provided monthly through the use of the Expanded Family Child Care programs.

To this point in Fiscal Year 2003, through its different initiatives, Army child care programs have impacted nearly 10,000 families with more than 20,000 children by delivering 231,400 child care hours beyond “normal” operations. The Air Force, Navy, and Marines are providing comparable support to their families as well. In total, more than 400,000 hours of contingency related child care have been provided to military parents Department of Defense (DoD) wide.

Military parents are also concerned about the impact of the Global War On Terrorism on their school-age children and teens. All the Services have held meetings with teens to help develop the kinds of programs on the installations that appeal to this age group and help them cope with the changes in their lives brought on by a parent’s absence.

Communication with parents who are deployed is an essential factor in maintaining well-being in the lives of our children and youth. At youth centers, where computers with internet connectivity are available, our young people use e-mail and digital photography to stay connected.

New Ways of Providing Services

The Global War on Terrorism is transforming the way we deliver child care services to military families, particularly to those not living on or near military installations. For example, one of our National Guard Bases provided on-site child care to a Marine Corps Reserve unit located approximately two hours away. Although the child care staff had only three days to prepare for the request to provide child care for a Sunday deployment briefing – it happened...much to the great satisfaction of the Marine Corps

unit making the request. By offering child care to military parents located 100 miles away from the Child Development Center, the staff demonstrated they were not bound to delivering service in the “traditional” way.

The Military Services are piloting numerous outreach efforts aimed at serving geographically-dispersed Active Component Service members as well as Guard and Reserve members who are eligible to utilize these services while on active duty or in training status.

- A Memorandum of Agreement between the Army and the General Services Administration (GSA) permits active duty patrons to include Guard and Reserve in 23 communities throughout the country (e.g., Albany, New York and St. Louis, Missouri) at the same cost as at an Army Child Development Center.
- The Army is implementing several pilot programs to support monthly weekend drills for Guard and Reserve units and child care for 12 activated Guard and Reserve Family Support Groups.
- Cooperative agreements between the Army and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami, Florida; Killeen, Texas; Tacoma, Washington; Silver Spring, Maryland; and Dale City, Virginia, are allowing the Clubs in these local communities to offer services to military-connected youth that are comparable to Army Youth Programs in terms of training, staff supervision, and predictable programming.
- Our Military Youth Programs are receiving strong support through our ongoing partnerships with the United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service (i.e., 4-H Clubs) and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.
 - In support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Boys & Girls Clubs all over America have “opened their hearts and doors” to our school-age children and teens of military families living off-post, as well as to children of Reservists and National Guard. Children can participate in local Club activities for little or no cost to their families.
 - Cooperative Extension Service “military liaisons” in 38 states are supporting military-connected children and youth through a variety of outreach initiatives. These state and local 4-H Club partnerships with

Military Youth Programs reinforce a sense of community for our school-age children and teens whether they live on or near a military installation or are a part of the greater community. Wherever they move, our youth are involved and connected in 4-H clubs.

We are encouraged by these successes and by that fact that each of these deployment support initiatives has the potential to be expanded to additional sites.

A Systematic Approach

The Department of Defense is working to institutionalize our “lessons learned” by establishing an infrastructure to support the child care and youth supervision needs of our military parents. This systematic response may range from ensuring we have a cadre of well-trained Home Care providers who can handle long-term care or respite care to support that single Service member or that “geographically-single” spouse, to guaranteeing extended hours that mirror the installation duty day at Child Development Centers so that dual-employed military families can meet their military obligations.

Working parents and Service members require a range of baseline programs to support their child care needs. These programs and services are vital in ensuring that military parents have reliable child care options that minimize lost duty time. Normal duty requirements usually involve **Full Day Care** in Child Development Centers, Military Child Care Homes, or Before and After School Programs. Full day operations cover a range of duty hours usually from 6 a.m. – 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. **Hourly Care** is provided in these same programs to support the intermittent child care requirements of both working and non-working parents. Non-working parents who volunteer their time supporting family programs use hourly care options. **Youth Programs** provide predictable options and services during out-of-school time particularly for middle school youth who are too old for child care and too young to drive or have a job. Youth programming can include leisure activities, life skills classes, opportunities to volunteer for community service, workforce preparation, individual/group sports and fitness activities, homework centers, and youth technology labs.

Many military parents often need care beyond the normal duty day. **Extended Hours Child Care**, usually offered in Military Child Care Homes on and off post, must be available for children of parents who require routine evening child care, work unusual or long hours, or have mission related child care needs that require services over 12 hours a day. Parents involved in training exercises or temporary duty away from their home station may require **Round-the-Clock Care** with specially trained Home Providers for periods of up to 60 days.

Single parents and parents with deployed spouses find themselves dealing alone with the stresses of parenthood. **Respite Care** offers short-term hourly care to provide them a “break” to tend to family business or take time for themselves. Respite care services, often offered as part of a child abuse prevention plan, are generally at no cost to parents for limited periods of time or offered at a reduced rate.

We believe much lost duty time is due to routine child illnesses and unreliable child care arrangements. **Back-Up Child Care Homes** are an option to provide care when routine child care arrangements break down or cannot be used. Many times it is the Service member who takes time off to be with a child recovering from a cold because the spouse holds a job with limited benefits and would lose needed income from a day's pay.

On-Site Group Care, provided in non-traditional settings, is often used to support command functions, e.g., pre-deployment briefings. Child care staff come to the event location with mobile child care kits and “set up shop.”

We need to institutionalize services such as these to support military parents who are under constant stress of a high Operating Tempo and frequent deployments.

School Transition Support

Just as we are sharing our lessons learned in Military Child Care, the work the Army is doing in partnership with local school systems is applicable to ease school transitions for any mobile student.

In 2000, the Army, in partnership with the Military Child Education Coalition, conducted a study to gain a greater understanding of the challenges that military-sponsored students face when transitioning from one school district to another. The findings included student difficulties with transferability of student records, course grades, credit hours, and high stakes testing requirements of different states as they moved from school district to school district. Of course, these are issues that impact all mobile children and not on just those children with military parents.

To institutionalize the results of the Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS), the Army has funded School Liaison Officer positions at Army installations to facilitate school transitions for our children. These trained professionals are providing Army families with consistent and predictable transition support services, e.g., improved communication about school calendars, graduation requirements, records transfer, and opportunities for students to more rapidly develop social and emotional connections to the new school and community.

The number of school systems serving children from families of all branches of the military who are willing to both emulate promising practices and share ideas that will make the transitions easier encourages us. To date, 125 superintendents, representing 129 school districts, which encompass over 2.5 million school-age children, have signed the SETS Agreement to facilitate the development of reciprocal school policies and practices to institutionalize processes for school transitions. The vast majority of the signatory school systems are stateside public schools, and I am pleased to note that all of our Department of Defense Dependent Schools and Department of Defense Domestic Elementary and Secondary Schools are signatories. The Army is forming a

steering committee of superintendents to promote communications among these school systems and expand the SETS Agreement process to major school systems supporting military installations. A web-based “forum” will allow all SETS superintendents to network and share information on promising practices. We are asking local schools to consider policy changes in order to level the playing field so all mobile children have the same opportunity for academic success and smooth school transitions. We are hopeful all major school districts serving military-connected children will become signatories of the SETS Agreement so that no child is “left behind.”

During Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, it has been clear that SETS school systems are committed to responding to the needs of our military children. Superintendents, principals, and counselors welcome information about how to support our children, including military support services available for their use. Teachers and counselors are extremely positive and demonstrate a genuine interest in the well-being of our military-connected children. Because these partnerships with the local schools were well established prior to the need for them, the outcomes resulted in a better understanding among students, parents, and school personnel as mobilization of Soldiers occurred.

School systems who are members of the Military Child Education Coalition, a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to address the education needs of children in military families of all Services, receive an “interactive counseling center.” This point-to-point video teleconferencing computer system enables counselors from the losing school to communicate with the receiving school when a student is in transition. Copies of transcripts, course descriptions, and other records can be reviewed on screen and transmitted real time to either school. This is an excellent tool for both and parents counselors.

The Military Child Education Coalition also sponsors a Transition Counselor Institute series to help school guidance personnel work with military-connected children. Subjects include the military lifestyle, deployment, and relocation issues. The Military

Child Education Coalition has trained almost 1000 educators from 29 states and overseas through this Institute.

Since April 2001, the Army has allowed more than 2,400 Soldiers with children entering their senior year in high school to remain an extra year at their current duty station. Soldiers may apply to the Army Personnel Command for stabilization approval 12 months prior to the start of their child's senior year. Only 21 requests, fewer than one percent, have been denied because of the needs of the Army. As of June 2003, 60 requests were pending approval. The Army evaluates the applications on a case-by-case basis and looks to be able to say "yes" to the request.

Families tell us this process works. Students are able to prepare for post secondary opportunities, go to the prom, and graduate with friends they made during their high school days. Army service now means one less sacrifice for families. We are being told we are doing the right thing.

Conclusion

In August 1990, the House Armed Services Committee challenged DoD *"to be on the leading edge of the child care movement in America."* The Services responded by making military child care, once derided by many as the *"ghetto of child care,"* as the model for national child care reform. Indeed, a May 2000 report issued by the National Women's Law Center entitled: "Be All That We Can Be...Lessons from the Military For Improving our Nation's Child Care System," notes: *"The best chance a family has to be guaranteed affordable and high quality (child) care is to join the military."* Several states are now piloting the key components of the Military Child Care System, in response to the language in the Fiscal Year 2000 Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 106-65, "Support for Expanded Child Care and Youth Programs Services for Dependents." We believe that this effort, in addition to improving child care in the private sector, will lead to additional quality child care options for military parents.

Although military child care programs are acknowledged as a benchmark model today, we are evaluating our present operations with a clear view of where we must go in the future while maintaining the key elements of quality, affordability, and availability that define our DoD Child Care and Youth Program policies.

Our new challenge is to sustain our baseline Child and Youth Programs and develop the infrastructure that will allow us to routinely provide predictable services such as school transition assistance, offer respite and extended hours care as needed, identify care options for geographically-dispersed Service members, support youth communications with deployed parents, and facilitate partnerships with schools and community organizations that will increase the availability of care for military-connected children. Only by looking at these options, in addition to our existing baseline programs, will military parents have sufficient affordable, quality child care and youth supervision options.

To do so, we must focus our planning on ensuring fee equity for all patrons regardless of whether they choose care in Child Development Centers or in Military Child Care Homes; increasing the availability of off-post care options that are comparable in quality and cost to on-post programs; stabilizing our child care workforce by paying competitive wages; and offering career potential – especially for our military spouse employees – within the Military Child and Youth Program system DoD-wide, and constructing additional on-post child care facilities where necessary.

We must also, however, recognize that we are accountable for our operations and deliver back to military families and to the American taxpayer the very best and most efficient system that we can. We have done that and will continue to do so.

Military Child Care and Youth Programs are absolutely essential to the well-being of our military families. Your Committees have been champions of Military Child and Youth Programs for more than 20 years. We believe DoD and the Military Services have delivered measurable cost, quality, and availability outcomes. These outcomes are

documented by various private sector reports and studies done by the General Accounting Office, RAND Corporation, our national professional accreditation status, and media stories. A May 17, 2000 *USA Today* quote sums it up: *"The military is the model of child care efficiency."*

I hope that you would agree that the Nation has received an excellent return on its investment in military child care. On behalf of military parents all over the world, I ask your continued strong support for our Military Child Care and Youth Programs. Military parents face a variety of challenges every day. Knowing their children are well cared for should make those challenges a bit easier to handle.

Thank You.